Strategy Research Project

RETHINKING STRATEGY POLICY OF COUNTER INSURGENCY IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

BY

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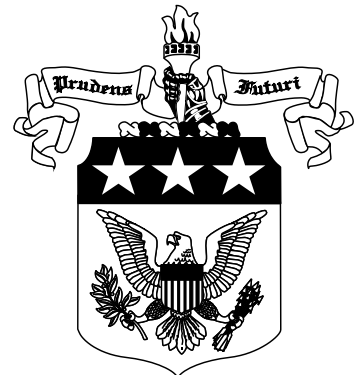
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This paper will evaluate this internal conflict to determine the grievances and drivers of conflict and propose a new approach for consideration to guide future policy and strategy.

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ABSTRACT

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The three southern border provinces which are Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and part of western songkla in Thailand are facing internal conflict with international implications. The conflict has many root causes; history, political, economic, and social problems. The Royal Thai Government will be rethinking strategy policies of their counter insurgency and issuing a new approach toward the problems.

This paper will evaluate this internal conflict to determine the grievances and drivers of conflict and propose a new approach for consideration to guide future policy and strategy.

RETHINKING STRATEGY POLICY OF COUNTER INSURGENCY IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

The objective of rethinking strategy policy of counter insurgency in three southern border provinces (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat), and part of western Songkla Thailand are in order to know what are the issues and the goal to be accomplished. In addition, this paper will propose how to solve these issues by a new approach for consideration to guide future policies.

The southern border provinces in Thailand which the same culture, tradition, ethic, languages or closer relative together are covered in five provinces (cities): Pattani, Satun, Songkla, Yala, and Narathiwat. In this area the majority of people are Thai-Malay ethics which approximately seventy two percentages of population while the rest are Thai and Chinese. Islam is the main religion in the area thus Buddhism is minority. Yawi (Malaysia language) is predominant dialect using in common, however in Satun and Songkla have both Thais and Malays which the most part speak Thai language.[1]

In southern border region of Thailand in the provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and part of western Songkla insurgency have been occurring which facing internal conflicts with international implication. The internal conflicts have many root causes: history, political, economic, and social problems. The Royal Thai Government (RTG) will be rethinking the strategy policy of their counter insurgency and issuing a new approach toward the conflicts.

This paper will evaluate the internal conflicts to determine the grievances and drivers of conflict as well as purpose a new approach for consideration to guild future and policies.

<u>Internal Conflicts</u>

History. Between the second to fourteenth centuries this area had an important trading seaport in Malaya peninsular and Java (today is the Indonesia). The area is one of the oldest kingdom was known as Langkasuka Empire which centered in Pattani and encompasses of Malaysia states: Kelantan, Terengganu, and northern of Kedah. The Islam and Buddhism were the primarily religion since establishment. While Pattani was Islamized in debate, it was certainly one of the earliest Malay kingdoms to adopt the Middle Eastern religion around mid-thirteenth century.[2] The Langkasuka Empire declined in the fourteenth centery.

In the fourteenth century, King Ramkhamheng the Great of Sukhothai Kingdom occupied Malaya peninsular; Nakorn Sri Thammarat and its vassal states including Pattani because of the declined of both empires. It is not known precisely when Pattani was first founded, but evidence points to sometime in the fourteenth century.[3]

When Sukhothai Kingdom declined and combined to Ayutthaya Kingdom, Pattani was considered as semi-independent state. The Sultanate of Pattani had required that royal tributes sent to the King of Ayutthaya Kingdom every three years as well as sent troops, weapons, and supplements when Ayutthaya in war to show its submission. Until Burma Kingdom defeated and destroyed Ayutthaya Kingdom, Siam had broken apart as a result that Pattani declared its independence through Thonburi Kingdom.[4]

King Taksin the Great of Thonburi Kingdom managed to defeat the Burmese and reunify the country in the fifteen years of his reign, opening the way for the

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establishment of the Chakri dynasty by his successor, King Rama I. Prince Surasi, the younger brother of the king, sought the submission of Pattani and took the symbol of Pattani's military strength: the Seri Pattani and Seri Negara cannons to Bangkok which displayed in front or the Ministry of Defense until now. In the beginning of Chakri dynasty, Pattani tried to fight for independence many times. In 1909, Pattani was formally annexed by Siam, followed a Bangkok Treaty with the British recognizing it. Until King Rama VI issued policy to allow the Islamic areas to administer themselves which calmed the situation down.[5]

In 1939, General Plak Phibulsongkhram, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand issued and implemented the Rathaniyom policy or Pan-Thai national policy in order to bring back the area inhabited by Thai people which was lost during imperialism period to western powers that colonizes them. This policy against culture and tradition of Thai-Malaya people who living in five provinces southern Thailand that need to pursue their way of Islamic religion. As a result, Thai-Malaya people immigrated into the north states of Malaysia. Furthermore, it made conflict and suspect between the government official and the leader of Thai-Malay. It had created more than sixty insurgent groups operating in the area and there were number of uprisings occurred between 1940s-1980s.[6]

In the early 1980s, General Prem Tinasulanonda, Thailand's prime minister who was originally from the area, knew the root causes of conflicts. He reversed the assimilation policy and offered political participation by supporting Muslim cultural rights and religious freedom, granting a general amnesty to insurgents, and providing economic opportunities to the people in southern Thailand.[7] As a result, a lot of

insurgent accepted the amnesty. Besides, he established Southern Border Provincial Administration Center (SBPAC) to coordinate and work between the RTG in Bangkok and local provincial administration government. And the Civilian-Police-Military Combined Forces 43 (CPM-43) task forces coordinated all security operations to resolve the situation occur in the south and worked closely with the SBPAC. It has been said that the SBPAC and CPM-43 were key elements in the RTG's successful counter insurgency campaign.

Political. The Thaksin Administration, 2001-2006. Police Lieutenant Colonel Thaksin Shinnawatra Thailand's prime minister was heavy-handed increased the distrust and violence between Malay-Muslims and the Thai authorities. He imposed political control in the southern border provinces because it belonged to an adversary political party. He removed important political persons who knew the root caused and removed people from the intelligence agencies from the area and replaced key officials with his followers. His policy increased the intensity of conflict.

In 2002, he believed the violence as simply a turf war between rival criminal gangs as well as believing that separatism was no longer and happening in the southern border provinces. Thus, he abolished SBPAC and CPM-43 in order to deal directly with the local provincial administration government and people by lived up to increase his reputation or living up to his reputation.[8] This may be considered that to eliminate and discredited the former prime minister's policy and brought back the insurgencies to the region.

In 2006, General Surayuth Chulanont Thailand's prime minister established the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) which promised to develop situation by

negotiation with the insurgent groups, re-examine suggestion and recommendations. He apologized to the Thai people in the southern provinces for the Thaksin's hard-line policy and took more reconciliatory approach in the insurgencies.[9] He recognized the importance of improving governance, socio-economic development, and educational standard. He also promised to make Thai official more accountable for their actions, and investigate past abused.[10] The aim of the Surayuth government is to win the hearts and minds of majority population by improved levels of governance, righting past injustices, and initiating socio-economic development projects.[11] However, the insurgency still continued as daily operations. Even the present government collaborated with the Democrats party which received main support from the people in southern, there was no indication of peaceful in the area.

There are currently four insurgent groups operating in the three provinces and part of western Songkla. First, Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinate (BRN-C) possibly the largest and best organized of the separatist groups. The BRN-C is the only active faction of an organization founded in the early 1960s which fight for political groups and religious leaders. This group recruits members from Islamic schools. Second, Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) is part of a second wave of secular separatist group. This guerilla organization was established in 1968. A splinter called New PULO split from the group in 1995, but the two factions allied again two years later and the most of leaders are based in foreign country. Third, Gerekan Mujahidin Islam Pattani (GMIP) was established in part by Afghan veterans in 1995 to support a separate Islamic state. GMIP has connected with Malaysian counterpart named Kumpulan Mujahedeen Malay. Last, Bersatu was established in 1989, which the coalition counts

PULO, BRN, Barisan Islam Pembebasan Patani (BIPP), and Gerakan Mujahidin Pattani (GMP) because of the weakening among its members and for unity of operations. The BIPP changed its name to Bersatu in 1991.[12] Even though GMIP might connect with the other extremist groups; however, there are no evidence that Thai insurgency is part of the world Jihad.

The observers have emphasized ethno-nationalism as the primary driver of the current insurgency. Islam remains important and cannot be separated from Malay identity. However, the most commentators would agree that the religious element of the current insurgency is becoming pronounced. Thus, Islam increasingly serves as a "potent avenue to comprehend, rally, articulate, and express resistance against the current state".[13] What is acceptance in this point is that much of the violence being perpetrated today is Muslim against Muslim, whereas in the early stage of the insurgency it was Thai-Buddhist versus Malay-Muslim.

The growing sectarian nature of the conflict calls into question the role of radical Islam and the involvement of outside groups such as Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah(JI). Joseph Liow argues that the violence is primarily rooted in local grievances rather than radical Islamist ideology. He supports this opinion by pointing out that the southern militants' rhetoric does not make calls for worldwide jihad, that Western interests in Thailand have not been targeted, and that the insurgents have conducted suicide attacks.[14]

Ian Storey would agree that transnational terrorist groups such Al Qaeda and JI have played no operational role in this conflict. JI operatives offered assistance to southern Thai militant groups during 2002-2003. But these offers were rejected because

of differences over targets (JI wanted to attack Western targets in Bangkok). Because of the southern separatists do not see the creation of a pan-Islamic caliphate in Southeast Asia as their end game. The facts that the insurgency has been going well for the militants since 2004 without outside help, and that JI is currently preoccupied with re-establishing its power base in The Indonesia, militates against JI involvement for the immediate future. However, Malay-Muslim militants have been influenced by radical Islamic websites, and have copied tactics, such as the use of Improvised Explosives Devices (IED) and decapitation. Moreover, a major concern for practitioners in Thailand is that if the violence continues, JI or other groups will become involved, as Jihadists have done with conflicts in other countries.[15]

Although many groups are involved and none of the groups has claimed responsibility for the insurgency, there is general consensus among security practitioners in Thailand that two groups are responsible for the violence. The first group is the BRN-C and its armed wing Runda Kumpulan Kecil (RKK) and the second group is GMIP who meet on a regular basis to coordinate attack in the three southern border provinces.[16] It is possible that factions within the various groups might settle for the right of a group of people, at least as the first stage toward independence. In order to achieve independent statehood, both groups have adopted two strategies. The first is to shatter into two opposing groups of society, force Thai-Buddhists to move to another places, and destroy Thailand's governmental structure in this area. The second is the establishment of an alternative governance structure for the three southern border provinces – known in the lexicon of counter insurgency as a counter-state. "In December 2006 the *Bangkok Post* reported that separatist groups were planning to

form an alternative government for the Islamic Pattani State, which included their own flag."[17]

Economic. The economic problems in three southern border provinces have been created as an increase factor in insurgency. The number of poor people is high from the lack of high education and unskilled labor which have low income, not sufficient for survival. The agriculture structure is the main income but without business administration and services it cannot develop prosperity and generate sufficient income. The Surayuth's government has tried to kick-start the economy by stating that the three southern border provinces (include Satun and Songkla) is a special economic zone (Zone three). There are also a number of additional initiatives to encourage investment. The government also announced plans to revive the 1993 Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle Development Project which covers all five provinces.[18]

Furthermore, Surayuth's government has made significant progress in mending ties with neighboring countries, especially Malaysia. Malaysia Prime Minister Mahathir Abdullah Badawi has praised Surayuth's "more diplomatic" approach to the restive south.[19] Malaysia's believes that the problem is caused in part from a lack of social and economic development in the region. This has prompted the creation of the joint development policy, dubbed the "Three E's" for Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurship, aimed at bridging the income gap between Thailand's southern provinces and Malaysia's northern states. This agreement was signed on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in 2007.[20]

The other economic problem is the RTG failure to allocate budgets for local development because of corruption in investment funds which make difficult conditions for civilian investment.

Social Problems. The current phase of the insurgency seems to have incubated in the south's Islamic school (Pondok) during the 1990s. When the RTG offered blanket amnesties in 1984 and 1993. A minority refused to accept this offer and took up positions in the Pondoks; these schools provided them a forum to teach young Malay-Muslims about Pattani nationalism and belief injustices perpetrated by the Thai state. The teacher taught students feel that want to resist Thai authority. By 2000, their students were in teenager and ready to fight; 2001-2003 witnessed a happening in small scale attacks against symbols of the Thai state, with a major serious violence beginning in January 2004.[21]

That the Ministry of education (MOD) failure to administer the education system which is significant problem of the insurgency. The Pondok is confronting with the chances relevant in the context of social, political, and economic changed in the globalization. Some Pondoks have taught the greatest resistance and used the curriculum of separatism and Jihadi violence against espousing the view that the RTG is the oppressor. The Royal Thai Army (RTA) intelligence unit reported that Pondoks have become fertile recruiting grounds for the armed separatist movement and some of the local insurgent commanders are graduated from the religious school.[22]

The RTG believes that education in Pondoks which are supported by the Middle East countries, are security threats. Furthermore, Pondoks have become the both military interested targets and the RTG crack down on insurgency.

<u>The Goal to be Accomplished</u>

In light of the changing environment and factors created and accelerated by the borderless globalized world, Thailand is currently facing the emerging security challenges at an unprecedented scale including the intensification of international crime, unsustainable use of natural resources, the rapid growth of identity movements as well as the distorted political reform (due to some hidden agendas, the conflict of interests, and the deep-rooted patronage system) under the constitution. As a result, Thailand needs to adjust the paradigms to cope with such challenges by putting more emphases on addressing structure and culture dimensions, which is considered the root-cause of the problem.

The new dimension of Thailand National Security Policy (2007-2011) attaches its great important to human security which is considered as the core of the new dimension of national security based on strengths and weaknesses of the society. This policy should focus on maintaining security, peace and stability of the people; preventing new security threats through public awareness campaigns and educations; striving and adapting through any potential crisis during the political transitional period; as well as enabling the Thais to live in harmony, taking into careful account the multi-cultural society and differences among them.

The Thailand National Security Policy comprised of two important elements. The first element is considered as the short-term or immediate policy measures which aim at:

- Promoting trust and confidence among people and of the international community concerning Thailand's political transitional period.

- Implementing the non-violence and peaceful means with close cooperation of culture and religion based groups in the area as a way to lessen the degree of violence, and resolve the situation in the three border southern provinces.

- Equipping the society with all necessary knowledge, correct understanding and appropriate norms and values so as to enabling them to be well aware of, and be able to cope with social conflicts of violence.

The second element is five years policy which focusing on the issues as follows:

- Promoting the sincere loving feeling and sense of loyalty to the constitutional monarchy as a way to protect the most important and beloved institute.

- Promoting good governance and sustainable democracy in all sectors of the society at both national and local levels.

- Enhancing national defense capacities.

- Addressing transnational traditional and non-traditional security challenges and managing national preparedness in an effective manner.

- Promoting human resource development in all security-related fields.

- Balancing natural resource utilization and biodiversity conservation aiming at the protection of right and fair access to biological resources.

- Creating and maintaining secure and peaceful environment suitable for long term constant development in all aspects.

- Living in peaceful harmony with neighboring countries as well as in the international community.

The success of implementing the Thailand National Security Policy, which serves as the national guideline to prevent and resolve the problems affecting national security, depends largely on effective policy execution, implementation and management; comprehensive academic research into security related matters as a pathway to build up the knowledge based security community; encouraging the people to understand their duties and responsibilities; working in close collaboration and strengthening networks with non governmental agencies as an important supporting part to achieve the objectives stipulated in the policy; and putting in place the valid and reliable policy evaluation mechanisms and systems.[23]

How to Solve or Solutions

The solution of the problems are the RTG and the political authorities in Bangkok will rethinking strategy policy which combines measures focusing on stabilizing in political, economic, and social problem root causes of the issue.

Because of the situation in the three southern border provinces and part of western Songkla is fundamentally different from the insurgency of the past. The primary in the insurgency is an unconventional threat and not only a military threat. A conventional military operations response to a political is likely to worsen these problems. The current policy is use of military force. However, the large amount of military personnel in this area cannot solve the problems but also worsen the climate of fear.

To prevent the insurgent from gaining support, it is critical for the RTG did not overact to insurgent and insurgent-inspired actions in the past. The conventional mindset of the military establishment of forces have not helped to do the security situation in a better way, but fed the insurgency. Therefore, the military mission will

assist the police and political authority, when requested. The military only used as the weapon of the last resort.

The RTG will focus on problems by separate military operations and police mission to work with specific security alone. The most important thing for maintaining law and order should be handed over to the police duties. The police use as the weapon of the first resort against situation. This will require the police to improve in counter insurgency training, including the drafting and implementation of a code conduct. However, the military can restore law and order, while the police is working with the leader of community, the conflict can be solved by the police authority.

<u>Political Solution</u>

The RTG will build trust with Muslims in the three southern border provinces which is a significant step to win hearts and minds. The RTG will invest in forming trust-building relationships through the new dimension of Thailand National Policy (2007-2011) which aim at promoting trust and confidence among people and of the international community concerning Thailand's political transitional period as well as implementing the non-violence and peaceful means with close cooperation of culture and religion based group in a way to lessen degree of violence by continuous dialogue.

The RTG will understand the complex relationship of culture, ethnicity and religion belief and view Muslims with trust. The RTG will integrate agencies relevant by establish a Truth Commission with representatives between the local Muslim communities and non-Muslim civil society groups which headed by respected judges, to confront human rights violations in this area would be a first step to strengthen feeling trust. It seems that whatever approach the authorities take, it's the key to win the trust of the local people.

The extremely important key factor to regain the trust among them is improving community relation. The closed-door dialogue can be held with leaders of the Muslim community, Tok Gurus (Muslim clerics), and the leaders of the villages to reduce the tensions. This will make confident in Malay Muslim people in police and the military, the more likely they will be to help investigations and provide intelligence information which could help prevent attacks.

The Non-Government Organization (NGO) is other organization can be given a soft role in solving the three southern border provinces, at least on the social front. The improvement of social conditions will help address the grievances of the Muslim Malays in Pattani province and make less their pressure with other Thais and the RTG. The NGOs can support to improve economic and social problem such as education system for the population in this area by offered government support through funding by donates for their reform programs. The involvement of civic groups to provide a balance between hard and soft approaches one that is not too security-oriented could be build trust with Muslim Malays in Pattani.

The Islamist leaders can be expected to organize their own activities to fight for freedom. However, the investing in economic development in the southern border provinces and appointing Muslims to key positions are likely to dissuade public support for the insurgency and dissolve the political aspiration for freedom over time. This should be suitable by development in strong institutions both in the RTG and private sectors, and the empowerment of the civil society at the lowest level, which would work to reinforce national identity and national unity. Therefore, it is very important to change political mindsets consideration concepts of autonomy and self-government. For

instance, the RTG should rethink its view towards accepting the Malaysia language (Yawi) in the southern border province as a first step towards the self-government process.

<u>Economic Solution</u>

The development of economic in this area is extremely important element for conflict solution. Given the structural problems of economic development in the southern Thailand, any short term actions may have some symbolic effect on Thai population but will not develop the economic status in the south. In the long term, improving economic conditions are necessary to reduce the local potential for violent insurgency.

The RTG should consider focusing on the link between cooperation and the policy of international economic by culture and political. Most of the policies have had a positive outcome such as the construction of new deep sea port and land bridge project in the south, and road construction to combine the upper and lower south which support and convention in transportation. In a special economic zone (zone three) which a number of additional tax relief measures to encourage investment, the population should start invest in small entrepreneur such as clothing factory in their villages, changing agriculture and sea food products for export.

The RTG should consider changing its focus from the tourist industry and entertainment towards the development and design a new product for agriculture and fishing products. As a result, the per capita income of people in this area will improve and will be promoting a range of industries. Finally, the RTG will imply authority to control allocating budgets in local development which suggest for civilian investment in the future.

<u>Social Problems Solution</u>

Education System Reengineering. The RTG long term is to reform the Islamic

school system in order to reduce the influence of radical ideology in the three southern

border provinces. There are three concepts on understanding and changing the

education system. First, the RTG should consider ways of not suppressing the Islamic

school system; instead, it should work with these schools to achieve its agenda. It has

to recognize that with these Pondoks are potential leaders who can work with Bangkok

to help integrate the southern provinces into the Thai nation-state. Second, instead of

policies that control the Pondoks, The RTG could support education in Pondoks. For

instance, it can offer financial and technical assistance, enabling Pondox in upgrading

facilities, install computers and provide nationally-recognize diplomas and qualifications.

Finally, as for Pondoks that preach extremist ideas, the ministry of education (MOE)

needs to monitor each institution closely and only take necessary action when such

teachings clearly breach national security concern. Where Pondoks are engaged in

militant activities, The MOE should act against them but ensure that a policy of using

minimum force is adopted to avoid alienation the Muslim majority in Southern

Thailand.[24]

The MOE should establish a new institute to reform the education system. One of

the suggestions given by Pondok owner at a workshop organized by the Central Islamic

Committee of Thailand is the creation of a Pondok Institute Association that would

control an education standard for all Pondok. This proposal, if taken up and

implemented by the central government, would help in building trust and serve as

appoint of communication between Bangkok and religious leaders in Southern Thailand.

The MOE could also create higher education opportunities for graduates of Pondoks, so

that students from the Pondoks will not have to go to further studies in the Middle East countries. Another approach would be to set up state-run Pondok which provide vocational training and secular subjects intended to ensure better employment prospects for students on completion of their studies. Finally, the MOE should focus on increasing funding, support and attention to Pondok education by taking it under the auspices of the Islamic Council.[25]

The challenge for the RTG will be to refrain from approaching the Pondok problem with a one-size-fits-all policy which will serve to further lose support the Malay-Muslim community and heighten the legitimacy of radicalism and separatism between the religious teachers in the South. Therefore, reengineering the education system in the South and reforming Islamic schools to stop attempt at a radicalization of the local Muslim culture and religious practices, funded by Islamic foundation, is crucial. This end state would decrease the ideological and personal support for radical Islamist insurgency in the long run.[26]

International Relation Solution. The RTG will cooperation with neighboring governments, especially Malaysia on issues of border security, relation between southern border provinces of Thailand and northern states of Malaysia, and religion must be developed. There should be improved coordination the law enforcement agencies of Malaysia. This should take part in looking the two countries border and changing information to make understanding the overlap of insurgency and modern terrorist networks.

Generally, the information and intelligence sharing can be arranged at a threshold, which does not clash with jurisdictional issues and does not come in conflict

with politically sensitive sovereignty and non-interference norms. A common insurgency and terrorism database would be most useful in the changing of intelligence and information.[27]

Additional research is needed on how Thailand and neighbor countries such as Singapore relate to the Muslim minority community. The studies will begin with a focus on certain laws and administration and expand into concrete cooperation to help the Southern Thai Muslims to develop themselves to the Thai context. The Southern Thai Muslims can be exposed to other countries where the Muslim minorities have successfully contributed to their nation's progress and improvement.

Conclusion

The insurgency has a number of caused have focusing on history, political, economic, and social problems. The history can be use as a lesson learned for the present and the future forecast. The former policy against culture and tradition of Thai-Malay peoples who living in five provinces of southern Thailand did not work, these people need to pursue their way of Islamic religion and should be offered political participation by supporting Muslim culture rights and religious freedom.

The solution of the RTG is to use soft power approaches to win heart and minds of majority population by improved level of good governance which righting past injustices, select officials for duties in the South, capability, and high performance. The rethinking strategy policies combine measures focusing on stabilizing in political, economic, and social problems.

The RTG will not overact to insurgent and insurgent-inspired actions in the past by separate military operations and police mission to work with specific security alone, however the military can restore law and order.

The RTG will invest in forming trust-building relationships through the new dimension of Thailand policy (2007-2011) which aim at promoting trust and confidence among people and of the international community corning Thailand's political transitional period as well as implementing the non-violence and peaceful means with close cooperation of culture and religion based group in a way to lessen degree of violence by continuous dialogue.

The development of economic is crucial element of conflict solution. The RTG will focus on the link between cooperation and the policy of international economic by culture and political. Furthermore, the RTG should consider changing its focus from the tourist industry and entertainment towards the development and design a new household product for agriculture and fishing products.

The education system is significant problem of the insurgency. The RTG will reengineer and reform Islamic school to stop attempt at a radicalization of the local Muslim culture, religious practices, and also create higher education opportunities for graduates of Islamic schools, so that they will not have to go to further in other countries. This end state would decrease the ideological and personal support for radical insurgency in the long run.

The international relationship with neighboring government, especially Malaysia on issues of border security, economic development prompted the creation of the joint development policy, and religious must be developed with cooperation.

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